

WIC Vendor Advisory Council (WVAC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 30, 2007

Location: Connecticut Department of Transportation Conference Room B

Start Time: 2:00 pm

End Time: 4:00 pm

Recorder: Harriet Dennis

IN ATTENDANCE: Frank Alvarado, Brian Andrikis, Bruce Betros, Dennis Banks, Regine Beakes, Kimberly Boulette, Renee Coleman-Mitchell, Crecencio Custodio, Wilberto Diaz, Ron Esposito, John Frassinelli, Dr. Norma Gyle, Jannett Haughton, Ron Horvath, Kevin Krusz, Don Levenson, Adam Osmond, Janet Rankin, Kumi Sato, Patricia Sullivan, Joanne White

Dennis Banks, Food Delivery Coordinator for the Connecticut WIC Program, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the first WVAC Meeting. Dr. Norma Gyle, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Public Health (DPH) was introduced and she gave opening remarks. Members then introduced themselves providing their name and the organization that they represent.

Kim Boulette, WIC Vendor Specialist for the Connecticut WIC Program discussed the following business rules that should be adhered to while participating in this group.

- Cell phones should remain on vibrate and members should feel free to take calls in the lobby.
- All individuals must be treated with respect, allowing each person to complete their thoughts before making comments.
- Discussions will be halted if very little or no progress is being made after a reasonable period of time. The issue can be tabled and placed on the agenda for a future meeting.
- Non-agenda items that come up will be tabled for future meetings.
- Bring packets to each meeting as we may refer to Federal regulations, the WIC Vendor Agreement, WIC Approved Food List, etc.

The purpose of the Council is to provide a forum for meaningful exchange of WIC information between DPH, vendors, and the WIC community. It is an advisory group where recommendations may be made to improve services. The WIC Program is 100% federally funded and we must follow all Federal regulations. Someone asked if there was any Federal representation in this group and there is not, so if the Council suggests a regulation change, it would need to go through USDA.

The role of each Council member was explained. Members are making a commitment to serve 2 years on the Council, so they will be established and the vendor community will know who to go to with questions. Members were asked that if they could not attend a meeting to send an alternate who has been briefed on the Council, along with the meeting packet of materials. Most importantly, active participation of each member will be the key for this Council to be a success. Members are responsible for bringing back information to their organizations and the people that they represent. Kim will facilitate the meetings, but agenda items need to come from the group depending on the issues that are brought forward.

A member asked about putting WIC benefits on a card instead of using checks. Regine Beakes, Co-Director for the Connecticut WIC Program, gave a brief overview of the pilot project using smart card technology that Connecticut was involved in known as New England PARTNERS Project. This was a project that would eliminate the use of paper checks, be beneficial for the privacy of the participants and bring together shared information for health programs who had some of the same clients. The six-state project was terminated due to a number of complications.

Topics for discussion:

- ***New Formula Contract -***

Nestle products availability has been a complaint from many of the vendors. Customers not being able to find formula in the larger stores has been a problem. Ron from Henny's Wholesale Distribution stated that he uses 2 distributors and has never had a problem obtaining formula from Nestle. He also shared that they sell regular [milk based] formula 4 times more than soy formula.

Formula theft is a problem among many of WIC authorized vendors. Vendors say this problem has grown and is causing them to lose their WIC customers. Big Y Supermarkets suggested maybe vendors getting cameras to monitor all formula in their store. Dr. Gyle offered that maybe through the legislative process, there should be stiffer penalties for theft of formula.

In some hospitals, babies are being discharged with Mead Johnson products. State WIC staff feels if babies are discharged with Nestle products this will help the WIC participants in providing the needed formula. Nestle stated they would follow up on Nestle baby formula being providing in the CT hospitals. Dr. Gyle mentioned the idea of possibly setting up a meeting with the CT hospitals to discuss the need for Nestle products.

Pat Sullivan reported that WIC participants are not allowed to return formula back to the store if a wrong item is purchased or the baby's formula changes. Formula must be returned to their local agency and new checks can be issued to the participant.

- ***Minimum Inventory Requirements –***

Dennis Banks reported that all WIC authorized vendors must carry a minimum inventory at all times to meet WIC participant needs. This requirement is mandatory from USDA who approves the minimum inventory requirements.

Kim stated that maybe we could distribute the dates that satellite sites are held, so that vendors could increase their inventory during the beginning of the month or during a particular time period to accommodate WIC participants' WIC checks depending on the need in their area.

- ***Communications –***

Kim stated that we are looking for ways to increase communications with WIC vendors and thought that email would be the quickest way to provide updates on WIC information.

Kumi Sato stated that they do a newsletter mailing and about half of their members don't have email or a fax machine. The group was asked to bring this idea forward to the people who they are representing. This would certainly save time and notify vendors immediately about issues related to WIC and something that we can strive for in the future.

Open Discussion/ Suggestions for future agenda items:

A question was asked confirming that we have open enrollment for stores to apply just once per year. Per USDA, CT WIC has too many stores and the number of stores must be limited for us to effectively manage the program. The national average ratio of WIC participants per WIC vendor is 150:1. In CT this ratio is about 70:1. Kim added that currently we have 686 stores- 328 Small, 80 Medium, 165 Large, and 113 Pharmacies.

In 2008, the WIC food packages will be redesigned and will include food items that have not been approved in the past. We may require stores to maintain a greater variety of WIC foods in the minimum inventory and fruits and vegetables may be added to the program. All WIC authorized vendors will receive training with regard to the new food packages.

Kim stated WIC participant membership is needed for this council and that transportation and/or childcare funding will be provided for participants to attend. Everyone attending the meeting thought having the WIC Vendor Advisory Council is a great idea and is looking forward to future meetings. Many members of the council stated they hope to again better ways to help service the clients of the WIC program.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00. Members were directed to the bottom of the agenda for future meeting dates, times and location pending the responses received on the follow up questionnaires. Currently the next two meetings are scheduled for March 27 and May 29, 2-4 pm and if it's convenient for most, meetings will continue to be held on the last Tuesday of every other month. We are looking to expand this group; additional members were invited and couldn't attend the first meeting and we would like to add at least two WIC participants as members. Kim asked that agenda items be sent to her via email or fax and Dr. Gyle thanked everyone for attending.